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AUTHOR	Zughoul, Muhammad Raji
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ABSTRACT

This study examined the interlanguage syntax of Arabic speaking learners of English in the area of the noun phrase, focusing on the closed system elements that can occur before or after the noun head, the noun head and pronouns in line with Quirk and Greenbaum's (1977) treatment of the noun phrase. Participants were 25 Arabic speaking English language learners from seven Arab countries attending an intensive English program at the University of Texas Austin. The first 500 words of each student's oral production were analyzed, and a typology of errors based on a pilot project was established. Results indicated that noun phrase errors were second to verb phrase errors, forming 32.8 percent of the total number of errors in the sample. The most frequent noun phrase errors were in the use of articles, particularly the omission of the indefinite article in obligatory contexts, the use of "the" redundantly, omission of the article "the," and redundant use of the articles "a" and "an." Ordinals were used interchangeably, and quantifiers were confused as to their use with count/noncount nouns. Arab learners from different dialect backgrounds had different problems. Errors made by Arab learners of English were very similar to errors made by learners from other language backgrounds. (Contains 47 references.) (SM)

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Interlanguage Syntax of Arabic-Speaking Learners of English: The Noun Phrase

Muhammad Raji Zughoul
Department of English, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan

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INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The noun phrase has been the subject of a large number of research projects in thesis and dissertation form in Arab and Western universities. Most of these studies focused on contrast between an aspect of English on one hand and a variety of Arabic (regional, or dialectal) on the other. Reference can be made to Abu-Seif (1967) on nominals in English and Cairene Arabic; Hassani (1967) on the classification of the noun in both English and Arabic; Qafisheh (1968) on pre-nominal modifiers; Al-Safi (1972) on concord; El-derwi (1967) on number; Yassin (1977) on the genitive; Mehdi (1981) and Zughoul (1979) on prepositions; El-Sheikh (1963) on pronouns; Bulos (1960), Tadros (1979) and Toshie (1983) on relatives.

Several other studies of more general nature along the lines of Error Analysis included sections on the noun phrase. These include Samhoury (1966) on Syrian students; Yacoub (1972) and Al- Ani (1979) on Iraqi learners of English; Tadros (1966), El-Hibr (1976) and Kambal (1980) on Sudanese learners; El-Ezabi (1967), Rouchdy (1970), Emam (1972) and Mattar (1978) on Egyptain learners; Kharma (1981) and Al-Qadi (1982) on Kuwaiti stdents; Abu-Shanab (1978), Miller (1981), Hanania (1974) and Hanania & Gradmann (1977) on Saudi learners; Meziani (1984) on Moroccan learners; Mukattash (1978), Al-Musa (1974), Al-Qasim (1983) and Shaheen (1989) on Jordanian learners. Of more general nature which included students from more than one Arab country were those of The Defense Language Institute (DLI 1969), Willcott (1972, 1978) and Scott & Tucker (1974), Kharma and Hajjaj (1989) and Aziz (1996). Though contradictory on some aspects, the findings of most of these studies has been strikingly similar. This study is error analytic and comprehensive in the scope of its coverage and data base.

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OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The objective of this paper is to report the findings of a study of the interlanguage syntax of Arabic-speaking learners of English in the area of the noun phrase. More particularly, this study will be concerned with the closed system elements that can occur before or after the noun head, the noun head and pronouns in line with Quirk and Greenbaum (1977) treatment of the noun phrase. The subjects of the study were twenty five Arabic speaking learners of English from seven different Arab countries (Algeria 2, Lybia 5, Egypt 5, Jordan 3, Lebanon 2, Saudi Arabia 7, Bahrain 1). They were attending the Intensive English Program of the University of Texas at Austin. The first 500 words of the oral production of each of the 25 subjects -- a body of about 12,500 words -- was selected for description, analysis, quantification and explanation of errors. A typology of errors based on a pilot project was established, part of which deals with the noun phrase.

FINDINGS

The count of errors in the corpus in general indicates that noun phrase errors are second to verb phrase errors. They form 32.8% of the total number of errors in the sample. Table 1 is a summary of the errors in the noun phrase.

Table 1
Summary of Noun Phrase Errors

			% NP	% Tota
Determiners				
Articles	161		38.0	12.5
Omission of a, an	076		47.2	17.9
Use of THE for 0 article	043		26.7	10.1
Use of 0 for THE	018		11.1	04.2
Use of a, an for THE	013		08.0	03.0
Substitution	011		06.8	02.6
Other determiners	010		02.3	00.7
Predeterminers	002		00.4	00.1
Postdeterminers				
Ordinals	014		03.3	01.0
Quantifiers	017		04.0	01.3
204	48.2	15.8		

NOUN ERRORS				
Wrong number		73	17.2	5.6
Misformation of plurals		09	02.1	0.6
Misformation of nouns		06	01.4	0.4
Confusion of Ns with other parts of speech		19	04.4	1.4
Noun as a subject or an object		57	13.4	4.4
Repetition of S				
Omission of S				
Omission of object				
Pronouns		47	11.1	3.6
Pronominal reference				
Reported speech				
Omission of pronoun				
The genitive		08	1.8	0.6
			approx.	
423	100%	32.8		

DETERMINERS

ARTICLES

The most frequent errors in the noun phrase area are in the use of articles (38%); they formed 12.5% of the total number of errors. In his error analysis study on Arab students, Willcott (1972) concludes that definiteness problems were far more frequent than any other problem in English syntax faced by Arab students. Where the count may differ, the results of this study confirm that definiteness is a serious problem for Arab learners of English. Following are examples of the article error types from the data.

Omission of the indefinite article A, AN, (0 for A, AN)

1. Tom is very good teacher.
2. They don't give certificate.
3. It is French company.
4. I filled application.
5. It is English program.
6. I don't have opportunity to take French.
7. I don't have plan to work outside the country.
8. I worked in Japanese company as storekeeper.
9. When you live in apartment, you buy your food yourself.
10. It is good change.

Redundant use of THE (THE for 0 article):

11. We study in the night.
12. The problem here is the money.

13. The life is cheaper in Saudi Arabia.
14. The American food bad for me.
15. We have many jokes about the Englishmen.
16. I am reading Readers Digest which describe the life in America.
17. I watch it at the Dobbie Mall.
18. The water and the electricity are very difficult.
19. I like the life in Seattle more than in Austin
20. The fruit in Lebanon is cheaper.

Omission of the definite article (0 for THE).
21. I visited animal zoo.
22. We went to Libyan embassy.
23. It belong here to United States.
24. He slept in Dallas until next day.
25. I spend most of time in the Union because there is people.
26. You can talk about political situation. Redundant use of the indefinite article

A, AN (A, AN for 0).
27. I always look for a work.
28. I heard a news from him.
29. I drink a tea in the break.
30. She give us a homework everyday.

Substitution (the for A, AN).
31. I want to study the area and get the house and fix everything.
32. We rent the apartment near UT.
33. I take the English course with her.
34. I borrow the cup from the office.

Omission of the indefinite article A, AN. The most freqent error within this category was the omission of the indefinite article in obligatory contexts (44.6%). It should be pointed out here that as in the case of be omission or the omission of the third person singular -s, the subjects of this study did insert the indefinite article properly in some cases and omitted it in others. Not in one single case was there consistent omission of the indefinite article. However, the range of error varied significantly from one subject to another. Definiteness versus indefiniteness is a universal feature in linguistics. However, languages express these concepts differently. In Arabic, a definite noun is usually marked by the particle ?al, which is referred to as ?al al-ta9ri:f (instrument of definition), while the indefinite noun is unmarked. In other words, Arabic has no article equivalent to a or an.

35. This is a book.
ha:oa: x x kita:b

The absence of an article in the Arabic equivalent of sentence 35 is an indicator that book is indefinite. Moreover, definiteness and indefiniteness have different distribution in the two languages such that a noun used with a definite article in Arabic may be indefinite in English. A more detailed discussion of the issue of definiteness will follow in the next section.

The absence of markedness for the indefinite article in Arabic has been proposed by contrastive and error analyses studies like (DLI, 1969; Willcott, 1972, 1978; Kharma, 1981) as the main source of error in the case of article omission.

Use of THE for 0 article. The second most frequent error in the use of articles was the use of the redundantly, i.e., where 0 article is obligatory in this context. Sentences 11-20 are examples of this error.

The redundant use of the in sentencs 11-20 has the effect of changing reference, thus changing the meaning, from a generic to an anaphoric one. This is one of the main areas, i.e., expression of generic versus specific reference where there are significant differences in the use and distribution of the article in Arabic and English. In English, the number variable gets into the expression of reference. In the case of countable nouns, generic reference can be expressed in one of three ways (Quirk and Greenbaum 1977):

36. The lion is a wild animal. (Subject is singular, definite)
37. A lion is a wild animal. (subject is singular indefinite.)
38. Lions are wild animals. (Subject is plural indefinite.)

In the case of noncountable nouns, however, only 0 article is possible in the expression of generic reference, as in the sentence: Gold is expensive. In Arabic, generic reference is always expressed with the use of the definite article with count and noncount nouns alike. Thus, the following sentences are rendered in Arabic as follows:

39. A dog	is	a	faithful animal.
al-kalbu			hyawa:nun ami:nun
The dog			animal faithful.

40. Dogs	are	faithful animals.
al-kil:abu		hayawa:na:tun ami:nah.
The dogs		animals faithful.

41. Gold	is	expensive.
al- oahabu		ga:lin
The gold		expenesive.

Some count nouns are used with 0 article in English in abstract and idiomatic expressions that denote seasons (in winter, in summer), institutions (in bed, in hospital, in school), means of transportation (travel by car, go by bus), times of the day (at night, at sunset), illnesses (anaemia, influenza); they are also used in some parallel structures (day by day, face to face, man to man). In all these instances, with a few exceptions in the parallel structures category, Arabic uses the definite article. Included also is the case of "unique" reference, as in names of festivals, months, and days of the week, where Arabic mostly uses the definite article.

The contrast in the distribution of the in the two languages leaves room for interference. All the examples in this category (11-20) are produced with the in Arabic: the money, the life, the fruit, the water, the electricity , etc. Among these examples are instances where the is used with proper nouns, as in the Dobie Mall and the Dexter House. Again, if produced in Arabic, those proper nouns would be produced with the. Mother tongue interference, though significant in this case as a source of error, is among several other possible factors that will be discussed later.

Omission of the definite article THE. Sentences 21-25 are examples of this error. Willcott (1972) reported this error to be the most frequent error made by the subjects of his sample. In his examples, however, there were too many occurrences of one single item throughout his scripts, which is U.S. and was frequently unmarked by the. Though not required for grammaticality in the

noun phrase, the omission of the made the sentence "foreign sounding" or semantically unjustified by the larger context. This error cannot be explained in terms of mother tongue interference. In fact, sentences 21-24 can be good counter examples to any argument for interference since in the first language the context requires the use of the and the learner failed to insert it. The inherent difficulty of the articles in English and their semantic complexity are possible sources of this error.

Redundant use of the indefinite article A, AN. In a few occurrences (7.7%), the indefinite articles a, an were used redundantly. In these cases a was used with noncount nouns. This is a clear case of overgeneralization of rules. Substitution errors. In the relatively few occurrences of substitution errors in the use of articles (6.5%), the pattern was to substitute the definite article for the indefinite article as in examples 31-34.

Error analysis studies conducted on learners of English from various language backgrounds have consistenly shown that articles in English are difficult to learn. The patterns of error across language backgrounds are strikingly similar (Bhatia, 1973; Arabski, 1979; Duskova, 1969; Angwatanakul, 1976; Mirhosseini, 1986). Most of these studies attribute the sources of error to mother tongue interference. One problem with this explanation is that as Mirhosseini (1986) points out, the patterns of error are far more variable than what contrastive analysis would lead one to predict. Moreover, occurrences such as 21-24 in this study challenge contrastive analysis for an explanation.

The articles are the most frequent morphemes in English, and despite their frequency they are acquired by native speakers at a late stage. Though they are not grammatically complex since they involve one transformation (Brown, 1973), they are semantically complex and their semantic complexity is what makes them difficult to learn. Duskova (1969) hypothesizes an interference

different from that of mother tongue in the case of articles. She notes that once the learner starts internalizing the article's system, interference from that system begins to operate.

OTHER DETERMINERS

In a number of occurrences, some and any were used with singular count nouns as in sentences 42-44.

42. There is some student Arab in our class.
43. I have some friend in Austin.
44. There isn't any student Arab in our class.

While those errors can be interpreted more as errors in the use of the noun where a singular noun stubstitutes for a plural noun, it is the impression of the writer that Arab students tend to have difficulties distinguishing between the use of stressed some, which may be used with singular count nouns meaning "extraordinary," and the use of unstressed some, which is used with plural count nouns and noncount nouns (sentences 45-48).

45. It was some present that he bought for his mother.
46. He bought some presents for his mother.
47. That is some watch you have there.
48. There are some watches over there.

There were no other occurrences of error in the other classes of determiners.

PRE-DETERMINERS

In the class of predeterminers (the class of closed-system items that occur before determiners, i.e., both, half, all, double, twice, three/four. . . times), there were not many occurences of these items. In the few occurrences of all, there were two errors in the use of all. These were:

49. All we are are students now.
50. All them Libyan students are scholarships.

The first sentence is an error of misplacement where all can fit after we or are; the second is a case of the omission of of, which is obligatory in this construction. Libyan students is a repetition of them.

POST-DETERMINERS

General Ordinals (OTHER, THE OTHER, ANOTHER). The use of these general ordinals, as Quirk and Greenbaum (1977) call them because of their grammatical and semantic similarity to ordinal numbers, seems to be problematic for Arab learners. They were used interchangeably in some instances, mostly where the other and other were used for another, and then the other for other. Following are examples of this error.

51. It is one in the elementary school the other one in preparatory school and the others in high school.
52. I am going to other apartment alone.
53. One in the bank the other one is in company and the third one he is study
54. I applied for Kentucky and Oklahama and the other institute Florida Institute.
55. I still want to take another two semesters.
56. Austin Community College is cheaper than the other colleges.

Errors in these general ordinals account for 3.3% of the errors in noun phrase errors and 1% of the total number of errors. The source of error here could be the similarity of these forms and the relationship in their distribution to that of the articles. Once the learner masters the use of the articles, it is likely that he masters the use of other, another, and the other.

Quantifiers. Errors in quantifiers accounted for only 4% of the errors in the noun phrase and 1.3% of the total number of errors. Much was confused with many in 7 occurrences, few was used for a few in 4 occurrences, and little was used for a little in 2 occurrences. The following examples illustrate these errors.

57. There is too much Arab student in Austin.
58. I met very much Mexican people here.
59. I have few exams next week.

60. I will marry after just few years.
61. I work and get little moeny for my tuition fees.

The quantifier much and many have one equivalent in Arabic, "kaOi:r," where there is no distinction between countable and noncountable nouns. It is an error predictable by contrastive analysis and it did occur. The difference between few/ a few, and little/ a little is subtle in English and is generally hard to explain. Even when the negative-positive-contrast suggested by Quirk and Greenbaum (1977) is used, Arab students may be baffled by a contrast between several/not many and some/not much. Consequently, the only possible source of error here is the inherent difficulty of this structure in English.

Other Quantifiers. Phrasal quantifiers such as plenty of, a lot of, lots of, a great deal of, a good deal of, a large quantity of, a small quantity of, a great number of, a large number of, and a good number of did not occur in the data. From the writer's class-teaching experience, Arab learners of English are likely to confuse those used with count nouns with those used with nouncount nouns. Consequently, plenty of, a lot of, and lots of are the easiest to learn. However, those restricted to occurence with noncount nouns like a great deal and a large/small quantity/amount of may be used with count nouns by Arab learners of English. Similarly, quantifiers restricted to occurrence with plural count nouns like a great/large/good number of may be used with noncount nouns by Arab learners. Celce-Murcia and Larsen- Freeman (1983:198), in their discussion of quantifiers point out that many ESL/EFL textbooks "do not do justice to measure words or collective nouns and say little about quantifiers beyond contrasting the use of much/many and the meanings of a few/few and a little/little." They rightfully conclude that the quantifier-collector system in English is far more complicated than these textbooks would suggest and that it needs to be stressed more than it is at the present. The lack of occurrence of these items in the data provides further support to the earlier conclusion.

NOUN ERROS

Noun (noun head) errors account for 38.7% of errors in the noun phrase. Following are examples of these error types.

Wrong number: determiner and noun in disagreement in number.
62. They talk bad about our country and all Arab country.
63. I wrote many application.
64. Some teacher hate Arab.
65. I want to do this because I want take some lesson from my life.
66. I had some friend in the oil business.
67. Some college want five hundred.
68. One of his cousin is here.
69. One of my cousin he is in Florida.
70. One of his unle live here.
71. All the other sister they are studying now.
72. I have two hundred and fifty relative work in Khafjeh.
73. We are seven three sister and four brother.
74. There are twelve or thirteen university have this major.
75. They are American citizen right now.
76. They government chose the best student to send them abroad.

Misformation of plurals.
77. I cook Lebanese foods.
78. I mean pizza is not American foods.
79. Most of the people are foreigns.
80. I mean money and bookses.
81. Sometimes they talk about the womens.

Misformation of nouns.
82. I have some relationship as I told you, Uncle.
83. I try to have an acception from there.

Confusion of nouns with other parts of speech.
84. I have work in the Ministry of Financial.
85. May be you have a lot of foreigns.
86. There was too much violent form.
87. I am from Sweida; it is southern of Syria.
88. If you want the true, I lost many things.

Wrong number. Number is not more complex in English than it is in Arabic. Whereas in English nouns are either singular or plural, in Arabic they are singular, dual, or plural. Nouns are not only marked for number, but they are also marked for case; thus, kitabani (two books + nominative) and kitabayni (two books + genitive or accusative). Plural formation is also as complex in Arabic where plurals are formed by suffixation as in the case of sound masculine plural formation (mu9allim,

teacher/mu9allimun, teachers) and sound feminine plurals (mu9allimah, female teacher/mu9allimat, female teachers) or by vowel change and/or suffixation as in the case of broken plurals (tifl, child/atfal, children; kita:b, book/kutub, books; jida:r, wall/judran, walls). Moreover, the Arabic noun has to agree with the determiner and the verb in number, gender, and case as in

89. ha:t:ani al-ta:libata:ni katabata: al-wa:jiba
ha:ta:ni = this + female + noun
al-ta:libata:ni = the + student + female + 2 + noun
katabata: = wrote + female + 2
al-w:ajiba = the + assignment + accusative
These two students wrote the assignment.

The complexity of noun number in Arabic is expected to interfere positively in the learning of the English noun number. However, the difference in suffixation as well as the presence of numerous exceptions in English might partly account for some of the difficulties faced by Arab learners in this area.

An examination of sentences 62-76 shows that a serious problem for Arab students is the use of a singular noun where the plural should be used. Another way is to view the error as an omission of the plural marker. In the first five examples, a singular noun was used after all, some, many. In the next group of examples (86-70), a singular noun was used after one of. In the third group of examples (71-73), a singular noun was used after numbers more than one. In 74-75, a singular noun was in a context where the plural is appropriate.

In all these examples, with the exception of 72-74, the context in the native language requires the use of a plural noun. This makes an explanation of this error in terms of mother tongue interference difficult to accept. One possible explanation of these errors is the universal strategy of simplification, which usually leads to the omission of redundant features. The plural marker is a redundant feature in all these sentences where plurality is carried out by other components of the

sentence. Another possible source of error suggested by Bhatia (1972) is the fact that students usually learn the unmarked form--the singular--first. Based on the writer's experience, Arab learners tend to have difficulties in other aspects of number in English. One particular problem is related to singular and plural invariables. In the case of singular invariables, learners tend to pluralize singular noncount nouns as furniture, homework, information, meat, and bread. They also fail to use the partititives (a bit, a piece, a slice, an item, etc.) as means of imposing countability on these noncount nouns. The problem wih plural invariables (nouns that are only plural) is that Arab learners tend to use summation plurals such as scissors, glasses, shorts, trousers, and pliers in the singular, failing to use the partitive a pair of to impose countability on these nouns. Abstract adjectival heads such as the beautiful and the true are always confused wih personal adjectival heads such as the rich and the poor. Irregular foreign plurals coming fom Latin, Greek, French, and Italian take a lot of practice to master.

Misformation of plurals. In a relatively small number of cases, plurals were misformed. Mass nouns were pluralized as in sentences 77-78. Sentences 80 and 81, where bookses and womens occur, can be interpreted as cases of overinflection and overgeneralization of rules.

Noun misformation. In a few occurrences (1.4%), the noun was misformed. sentences 82-83 are examples of nouns misformed. In the first one, the student meant relatives, but used relationship; in the second one, the subject coined acception for acceptance. Both are examples of analogy.

Confusion of nouns with other parts of speech. In a relatively small percentage of occurrences (1.4% of noun phrase errors), nouns were confused with other parts of speech. As shown in examples 84-88, nouns were mostly confused with adjectives (financial-finance, foreign-foreigner, violent-violence, southern-south, true-truth). The students' preoccupation with producing the right

lexical item to convey the meaning may cause the student to overlook the form of that item. Moreover, there are striking similarities between the adjective and the noun forms in these examples. This error may be interpreted as a developmental error that disappears with further proficiency in the language.

Noun as a subject and as an object--repetition and omission. An error with a relatively high frequencey (13.4% of noun errors and 4.4% of the total number of errors) is related to the use of the noun as a subject and as an object. The following examples illustrate the errors in this area.

Repetition of the subject.
90. One he has a shop live in the East Coast of Algeria.
91. One he is working with the government, but he does not have a big post.
92. There are about twelve or thirteen university they have this major.
93. My brother in law he is doctor MD.
94. All the other sister they are studying now.
95. I visit one he is from Lebanon.
96. Rent here it is expensive.
97. The town it is not as big as Austin.
98. American people they can't get 500 in TOEFL.
99. One of my cousin he is in Florida.

Omission of the subject.
100. The first time X take it in five days in fifth of June.
101. X study English in Delaware.
102. . . . and then tell me if X bring five hundred.
103. Sometimes X go to Lake Austin you will go because I have a car.

Omission of the object.
104. I learn X in the high school for two years.
105. I can understand X.
106. No, he is not with the army, he pays X by himself.
107. I am going to take X tomorrow.
108. Yes, I like X.
109. No, I don't want X.
110. I visited X but I can't remember.

Repetition of the subject. Sentences 90-99 are examples of this error, which is relatively frequent. It is also a confusing error in terms of the established typology where it can also be considered under the redundant use of pronouns. Though the students are redundantly using pronouns in these examples, it is felt that the subjects hypothesized that the sentence would not be complete without

referring to the subject again. Most of the ocurrences of this error seem to be after one, and it is always the pronoun repeating the subject and never the other way around. In Arabic, there is generally a tendency to use independent (as opposed to suffixed) pronouns after nouns to achieve emphasis. Whereas English uses stress and intonation to achieve emphasis, Arabic uses pronouns redundantly to achieve it. Consequently, this can be interpreted as a transfer error.

Omission of the subject. Sentences 100-103 are examples of this error where the subject of the clause or the subject of the sentence is omitted. One possible explanation is that this kind of error is associated with oral production as opposed to writing. When speaking, native speakers of English delete the subject because it is usually known.

Omission of the object. An error that may strongly mark the production of the learner as "foreign speech" is the omission of the object in contexts where object deletion is a violation of English syntax. Sentences 104-110 are examples of this error and may be partly attributed to mother tongue interference; Arabic allows for a transformation where the object is deleted after verbs like want, understand, like, and take.

PRONOUNS

Errors in the use of pronouns account for 3.6% of the total number of errors. Besides the redundant use of pronouns, an error that was treated under subject errors, there were the following other error types.

Pronominal reference.

111. I show him and they say O.K.
112. If I don't like what they gave me, I can explain that to him.
113. They (teachers) tell you to do it, if you don't he don't care.
114. The people here is free. He can do anything like big man.
115. I meet some people in Abilene and I stay with him two month.

In reported speech.
116. Some friend told me that you have to spend two year in Britain in London.
117. They told me that you have to study over there I have no chance to choose.
118. He tell me if you bring five hundred you will stop.
119. When Gathafi came, he said that I stop alcohol just like that.
120. They told me that you have to apply again.
Pronoun omission.
121. I am going to take tomorrow.
122. I think I want to be an independent state.
123. I visited but I cannot remember.

Pronominal reference. On the whole, pronouns and pronominal reference do not seem to be problematic areas for Arab learners of English. Pronouns are usually introduced very early in school textbooks, they are very frequent, and there is not much room for interference from Arabic. In fact, given the complexity of the pronoun system in Arabic where each pronoun is marked for person (first, second, third), number (singular, dual, and plural), gender (feminine and masculine), and case (nominative, accusative, genitive), one may expect positive interference in the learning of English pronouns. Thus, a pronoun like hunna, for example, is plural feminine third person nominative while anti; for example, is singular feminine second person nominative. The presence of a parallel set of inseparable pronouns suffixed to words depending on case, gender, and number adds to the complexity of the Arabic pronoun system and is supposed to make learning the English system easy. It does seem to facilitate the learning of English pronouns because the errors revealed by the data of this study are relatively less frequent and limited in scope.

A look at the two groups of examples (111-120) shows that the problem is the confusion between him-them, which may be explained as a case of transfer from Arabic. Stylistically, a shift between him and them is normally made in spoken Arabic, but such a shift is not practiced in English. Pronominal reference was also confused in the particular case of reported speech where the subject starts to report then shifts back in pronominal reference to direct speech. Examples 116-120 show this confusion occurs mostly in the case of I-you. Again, those errors can be partly explained in

terms of interference because in spoken Arabic such a shift takes place. They can also be viewed as performance errors.

Pronoun omission. Examples 121-123 illustrate this error type, which was treated earlier under nouns. In those errors, the pronoun that is the object in the sentence is omitted, consequently resulting in such deviant utterances as I am going to take tomorrow.

Other pronoun errors. Other errors in the use of pronouns observed by the writer in other situations but that did not occur in the corpus include misformation of the reflexive pronouns (himself, themselves, yourselves, ourselves); they are sometimes produced by Arab learners as hisself, theirself, yourself, ourself, respectively. Arab learners also face difficulties in mastering the use of the possessive pronouns that function as nominals rather than determiners, i.e., my-mine, her-hers, our-ours, their-theirs.

GENITIVES

The occurrence of the genitive in the data was very low. There were eight errors (1.8% of noun phrase errors and 0.6% of total) in which the subjects omitted the genitive marker. Following are examples of this error.

124. One of my sister son live here.
125. I use my friend car.
126. I have all my friend assignments.

Whereas there are two forms for the genitive in English ('s and of as in the boy's book and the cover of the book), there is one form in Arabic, which is al-?idafah as in kitabu alwalad (book/the boy) and jildatu al-kita:b (cover/the book). It is predicted by contrastive analysis that Arabic speakers may have difficulties choosing the appropriate form of the genitive in English. Generally, the subjects of this study followed the commonly taught rule of using 's with human head nouns and of with nonhuman head nouns. However, when the 's form was required in context, the

frequent error was the omission of the 's marker as shown in examples 124-126. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) maintain that the main reason for this error is the fact that the 's morpheme has a low frequency in English compared with other inflectional morphemes such as the plural, the past, or the progressive. Because of that, it is acquired later than the more frequently occurring morphemes. Interference from Arabic may be a factor.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study has reported the findings of an error analysis project on the noun phrase. Arab learners of English from different dialect backgrounds had problems with definiteness in English mainly because of the differences in the expression of reference in English and Arabic. Ordinals were used interchangeably and quantifiers were confused as to their use with count/noncount nouns. The most frequent error in the use of nouns was that of wrong number. Other errors included the misformation of plurals, misformation of nouns, the confusion of nouns with other parts of speech, repetition of the subject and omission of the noun as an object. Pronominal reference proved to be not problematic despite the occurrence of a few errors in this category. While a sizable number of these errors can be explained by interference, some other errors defy explanations offered by the contrastive analysis hypotheses. Moreover, the errors made by Arab learners of English seem to be strikingly similar to those made by learners from other language backgrounds. A comparative study of errors in this area across different language backgrounds may reveal many more similarities than differences. The data for this study did not include many of the structures which were supposed to be covered by the analysis. The media (spoken English) and the data gathering technique (the interview) as well as avoidance on the part of the subject were major variables in limiting the coverage of the study. Other studies should illicit a wider spectrum of structures in the language.

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Signature: MRZughoul

Printed Name/Position/Title: Prof. Muhammad Raji Zughoul

Organization/Address: Dept. of English, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan

Telephone: 00962 2 7271120

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